

MEMORANDUM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

March 5, 1979

MEMORANDUM FOR:

ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI

FROM:

ROBERT PASTOR *BP*

SUBJECT:

U.S. Policy to Argentina (S)

Attached at Tab A is the report on Argentina, which I mentioned in a recent evening report item. After reading it, both Vance and Christopher were convinced that we should adopt a tougher approach to Argentina. From October - December 1977, we voted "no" on loans to Argentina in the IFI's. We changed our position to abstention in February 1978 and have kept it since then, hoping that would induce some improvement in the human rights situation. Such improvement has not occurred, and Vance and Christopher now believe that we should vote "no" on loans in the IFI's, lobby OECD countries to follow our example; and assess whether further action in X-M and OPIC should be taken. (S)

Assessment

The report was prepared by INR--not HA-- and it is a sobering document. The human rights situation in Argentina is the worst in the hemisphere, and despite repeated promises in 1978 by the Argentine government, it has not improved. Let me summarize the report:

-- There are 2900 acknowledged political prisoners; probably another 500 who are believed to be terrorists are held by the military; and a smaller group is being "rehabilitated." There is no effort underway to substantially reduce this number. (S)

-- "Physical and psychological torture apparently remain standard treatment." The Red Cross estimated that 90% of the political prisoners are tortured, and some are executed. (S)

-- Disappearances -- probably by security units -- continued at a rate of about 55 per month during 1978. (Argentina's Interior Ministry claimed 40 per month; while

Department of State, A/GIS/IPS/SRP

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ORIGINAL CL BY R. Pastor

DECL ☒ REVW ON March 5, 1985

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the Foreign Ministry admitted to 80 per month; Embassy estimates, 55.) Increasingly, the people who disappear have vague associations with the "political left" rather than with terrorists. Both international NGO's and Argentine human rights groups estimate that there have been about 15,000 disappearances in the past 3-4 years. (S)

-- Illegal invasion of the home -- including theft by security units -- remains as commonplace as fair public trials are infrequent. (S)

The justification for official terrorism is tenuous, even using the Argentine government's statistics. Argentina's Federal Security Service estimated that there were only about 400 active terrorists in Argentina in 1978, and even Videla has admitted that the war is over. INR concludes that the explanation for continued official terrorism is army politics. (S)

Policy

While I think the assessment is quite accurate, I draw different conclusions than State as to what policy we should adopt. I understand that Vance and Christopher approach the issue as a legal one: Argentina is unquestionably engaged in a systematic pattern of human rights violations, and the law requires that we vote "no" on non-basic human needs loans. (Laws on X-M and OPIC provide more flexibility.) The law only requires that we "oppose" such loans, and "opposition" has been interpreted to include abstention as well as negative votes so I believe we have some flexibility. (S)

In deciding what approach to take, I believe we should address two questions:

(1) What is the most effective approach to Argentina to encourage them to improve the human rights situation? (S)

(2) What approach will permit us to sustain in the U.S. our overall human rights policy? When we take punitive steps toward Argentina, we not only enrage the right-wing ideologues, we also arouse the business sector and the media in the U.S. This doesn't mean that we shouldn't necessarily take such steps if we feel that it's required, but it does suggest that we should move carefully and explain our position to a wide-range audience before taking any steps, least we jeopardize our overall human rights policy. (S)

An Effective Policy

What is the most effective approach? Argentina is a big, proud and subtle country. We have an impact on Argentine government

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decisions, but it's never as direct or as much as we want. This is the case of our human rights policy. (S)

The Argentine government wants a warmer relationship with us for three reasons: (1) our historical, reasonably close relationship; (2) the U.S. under Carter has the prestige and the morality which could contribute to the idea that the Argentine military government is legitimate; and (3) such legitimacy would undermine the civilians and the democrats in Argentina and therefore strengthen and contribute to the institutionalization of the military government. The Argentine government has pursued a two-track approach to try to get closer to the U.S.; (1) through lobbying and propaganda in the U.S., they have tried to undermine the credibility of our human rights policy, and (2) they have taken "baby steps" in the human rights area at home. I think our cool and correct posture has been as effective as any policy could be. I think negative steps as State envisages would not be any more effective with Argentina, and it would cause us serious problems in the U.S. (S)

In short, I would recommend that we maintain a cool and correct posture to Argentina, though we should continue to use every opportunity both directly and through third countries to encourage them to clean up their act. They will continue to try to lure high-level visitors, and we should resist that until progress is evident. (S)

But even if you believe as Vance and Christopher do, that we should take the negative steps outlined above, I would encourage delay. (S)

One could argue that we have been waiting for 18 months; what will several more months do? Four new factors argue for waiting a bit longer: (1) The Argentine government has been paralyzed by the Beagle Channel conflict for the past eight months; now that it's quiet, they have the opportunity to move. (2) Several of Argentina's most hard-line Generals have been transferred, and Videla and Viola are more secure than at any time before. (3) Argentina's Ambassador has just told Vaky that he thinks there is a good possibility of some progress on the human rights front over the next few months. And (4) the Inter-American Human Rights Commission is going there in May. We should wait and gear any new policy shifts to their report. That may mean a delay of six months or more.

RECOMMENDATION:

Vance has apparently decided to change our policy. I therefore recommend you call him and ask him to re-consider. If he remains convinced, you may want to ask him to delay a decision pending the IAHRRC report.

Approve _____ Disapprove _____

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cc: Jessica Mathews Views:

Bob is right that our primary concern should be what will work with Argentina. Our policy of the past year (abstention) certainly hasn't worked, and I have little expectation that prolonging it will change anything, despite the fact that the Beagle Channel dispute is over. On the other hand, a tougher posture probably won't work either. I suspect that in the near term nothing will work until and unless Videla gets much more secure or there is a strong change in Argentine public opinion.

However, there is one important consideration missing here, namely the relationship of Argentina to the rest of our human rights policy. As Bob points out, the situation in Argentina is the worst in the hemisphere and has even deteriorated in the past year (at least in relation to the terrorist threat if not in absolute numbers). While it is impossible to compare events in say Argentina and Indonesia, we do have to struggle to make the policy consistent insofar as we can, and by these standards there is a general consensus that we should be taking a firmer stand toward the GOA.

If neither posture is likely to be much more successful vis-a-vis the GOA, we should pick the one that is more consistent with the human rights policy -- returning to the tougher "no" vote position.

Jim

2B - Maybe we should
be friendly, strong then Videla
hand, and see if he then can
clean up his act. We would
take short term heat but it
might be worth it.

JD

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Carter Library
National Security Affairs
Brzezinski Material
Country File, Box 4
Argentina, 1/79-1/80